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Seniors in Small Town British Columbia: Demographic Tendencies and Trends, 1961 to 1986

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SENIORS IN SMALL TOWN BRITISH COLUMBIA:
Demographic Tendencies and Trends, 1961 - 1986

Gerald Hodge

Small towns all over Canada are increasingly becoming a frequent choice of elderly people to spend their retirement years. Today, fully one-third of Canada's senior citizens live in towns and villages, that is, in places with fewer than 10,000 residents. On average, small towns have a greater share of the elderly in their population than other forms of habitat. Moreover, these proportions continue to grow. The tendencies and trends are much the same in British Columbia's small towns.

We know little about the capacity of small towns to meet the needs of senior citizens. Rural environments, characteristically, have small numbers of facilities in widely dispersed clusters combined with a meagre supply of transportation services. With many elderly either staying in or moving to small towns, we are obliged to become aware of both the needs of seniors and the situation that is faced by those providing for their needs. In this respect, the small rural municipality is faced with new challenges and prospects, situated as it is at the frontier of this trend.

This study is concerned with the elderly population who live in small towns in British Columbia. It addresses three main questions:

1) Who are the small town elderly?

2) What is it like for them living in small towns?

3) What do these patterns portend for the provision of facilities and services for the elderly?

These questions are approached from a demographic viewpoint, by examining the numbers, composition, geographical patterns, and mobility of older people. This report provides a detailed examination of trends in the elderly population from 1961 to 1986 by age, sex, and mobility according to the size and location of towns in the province.

Researching B.C.'s Small Town Elderly

This research is based on a compilation of demographic statistics on the elderly in each of the municipalities in British Columbia for 1961, 1971, 1981, and 1986. Age and sex composition data are examined according to different sizes of communities and their location within the province. Mobility tendencies of the small town elderly between 1976 and 1981 are also analyzed. Data from the Census of Canada are used in these analyses.

There are inherent difficulties with data when studying small towns. The Canada Census provides two different sets of data that are relevant to small communities. One set comprises data describing communities by their population size alone. It further divides these data into "urban" and "rural" categories. "Urban" centres are places over 1,000 population that meet a certain density criterion. All smaller places, such as Kaslo, Hazelton, and Alert Bay, are counted within the broad "rural" category in these data.

The other set comprises incorporated municipalities. This enables small places that are incorporated, such as Midway, Clinton, Zeballos, and the three just mentioned, to be analyzed. The limitation with this approach is that more than 500 of the towns and villages in British Columbia are not incorporated (Hodge 1987). Unfortunately, this means one cannot determine the age structures for such places as Atlin, Hedley, and Lantzville.

The data for the demographic analysis of the elderly in this volume is drawn from both census sets. While many unincorporated centres are missing from these analyses, there is considerable evidence indicating that similar demographic trends and tendencies apply in both incorporated and unincorporated towns (Hodge and Qadeer 1983).

Seniors in Small Towns: Recent Canadian Trends

A review of Canada Census data reveals that during the 1960s there was a dramatic shift in the residence patterns of the rural elderly. Instead of moving to cities upon retirement, older people chose to stay in small towns (Hodge 1987). Between 1961 and 1971, Canada's small town elderly (65 years and over) increased in number by nearly one-third. This trend continued in the 1970s.

By 1981, on average the elderly accounted for 16.3 percent of the people who lived in centres of less than 10,000 population.

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The elderly comprised only 9.7 percent of the nation's population at that time. Moreover, these trends are strongest in the smallest towns. Those places under 1,000 in population have the highest proportions of elderly residents -- double the national average (see Figure 1). The 1986 census confirmed still further aging of Canadians and especially of their small town populations.

Table 1: Number of British Columbia Elderly Living in Different Types of Settlements, 1961-1986

Settlement Type	Number 65 Years and Over			
	1961	1971	1981	1986
Large Cities[1]	102,290	120,095	168,875	273,370est
Small Cities[2]	12,555	30,490	62,490	
Small Towns[3]	15,990	16,880	22,615	22,825est
Rural Farm	5,145	4,185	3,030	3,430
Rural Non-Farm	29,545	33,340	43,365	53,190
BRITISH COLUMBIA	165,525	204,990	298,175	349,385

Source: Census of Canada
Notes: [1]Places with populations exceeding 100,000
[2]Places with populations between 10,000 and 100,000
[3]Places with populations between 1,000 and 10,000

The continuing presence of the elderly in small communities has led to more and more retirees at very advanced ages. Close to 40 percent of the retirement population in small towns is 75 years of age or older. Also noteworthy is the tendency of the 55-64 year age group to remain in towns and villages. This age cohort is the source of new retirees and their persistence in small centres assures the continuance of aging trends.

Further confirming that the elderly are aging-in-place in towns and villages are recent migration statistics, which showed that they had very little tendency to move away from their small communities in the 1976-1981 period. Over 85 percent of those 65 and over continued their residence in these places. They were less than half as mobile as younger age groups in towns.

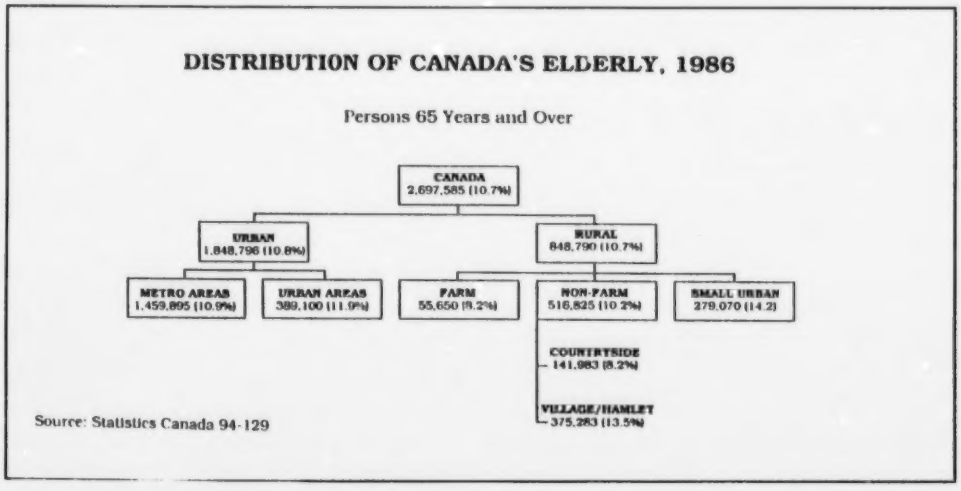
When older people do move away, about half move just within the same census division (regional district) and most of the remaining migrants stay within the province. Few move to other provinces. The small town elderly who migrate tend to prefer other small towns.

These various trends are well established and there is little reason to expect them to diminish in the foreseeable future. For example, the level of elderly one currently finds in Saskatchewan and Manitoba small towns (about 25 percent) is likely to be common in towns in the across the country within a decade or so.

These same trends have been occurring in British Columbia, although they are more recent than in other provinces (Gutman *et al.*1986). The surge of senior citizens in small town B.C. did not become widespread until the 1970's. However, both the 1981 and 1986 censuses showed that small municipalities in every part of the province experienced an increase in elderly residents.

By 1986, small towns in B.C. had, on average, just over 12 percent of their population aged 65 or more. This is up sharply from 8 percent only 15 years previously and represents one of the largest increases in small town elderly in any of the provinces. Today, over one-fifth of the total retirement population in B.C. resides in towns and villages.

Figure 1



DEMOGRAPHIC TENDENCIES OF SENIORS IN B.C. TOWNS, 1961-1986

Growth in Numbers and Proportions of Seniors

Nearly one out of every four British Columbians 65 years of age and over lives in a rural setting. That is, over 79,000 senior citizens reside in non-urban situations, according to the 1986 census (Table 1). This represents a continuation of the growth of the rural elderly since 1961. Although this growth has not been as fast as that occurring with the elderly in B.C.'s cities, the numbers of rural elderly have been expanding at ever-increasing rates. The latest census reveals that their numbers grew almost as fast as seniors in cities.

The expanded numbers of the elderly, both rural and urban, is due in large part to the large numbers of people surviving from the first quarter of this century when families were large. Their proportion in the total population has increased due to the greater longevity of people, and to the reduced family sizes of succeeding generations. The concentration of the elderly in one town or another is a separate aspect and is due to the mobility of the elderly. All of these tendencies are examined in this section using data from the Census of Canada.

B.C.'s rural elderly reside in three broad forms of habitat: in small towns, on farms, and in non-farm settings. Small towns between 1,000 and 10,000 in population currently accommodate about one-third. Only a small proportion live on farms (and their numbers have been declining). The bulk of rural seniors in B.C. live in non-farm settings, which means either in the countryside or in small, unincorporated villages and hamlets. Indeed, most of the non-farm elderly live in small centres -- about 75 percent, according to other studies (Hodge and Qadeer, 1983).

Using the same census settlement categories we may compare the situation of B.C.'s rural elderly with that of the entire country (Table 2). Two general tendencies emerge. The first is that there are relatively fewer rural elderly (and, consequently, more urban elderly) in British Columbia than in Canada as a whole. Second, the rural elderly are a growing proportion of the small town and non-farm populations in British Columbia as they are in the nation.

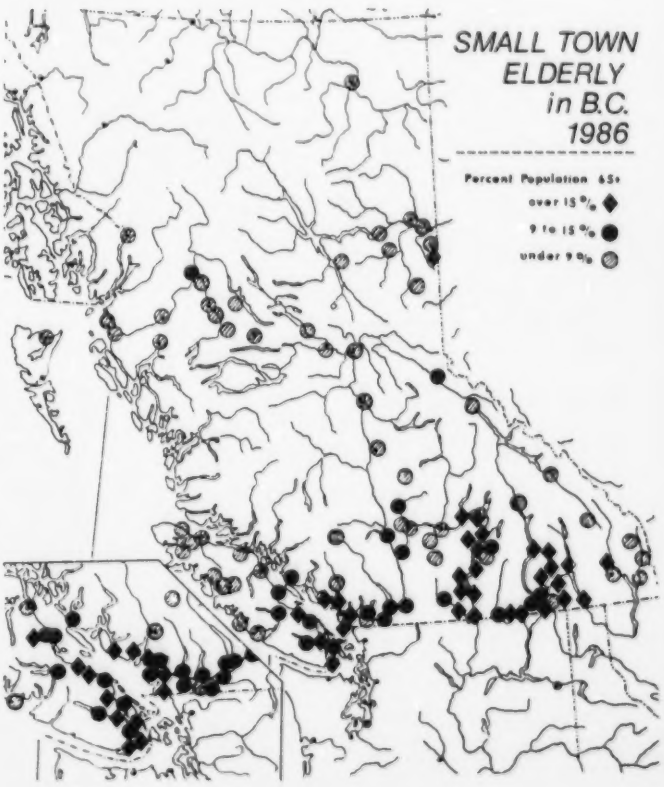
In British Columbia, the 1971-1981 decade saw a dramatic increase in both the number and rate of growth of the rural elderly, and their rate of growth quickened in the first half the 1980s (Table 3). Over the 25-year period from 1961-1986, B.C.'s rural seniors increased by over 56 percent.

About one-half of the rural elderly in British Columbia choose the small village or hamlet as a place to live. These small centres, along with countryside areas, have had the highest rates of growth of rural senior citizens from 1961 to the present time. Included in this "non-farm" group are the several hundred unincorporated communities of the province, such as Ruskin,

Table 2: Proportions of the Elderly Living in Different Types of Settlements, Canada Compared to British Columbia, 1961-1986

Settlement Type[1]	CANADA Percent 65 and Over				BRITISH COLUMBIA Percent 65 and Over			
	1961	1971	1981	1986	1961	1971	1981	1986
Large Cities	7.5	7.8	9.5	n.a.	10.0	11.0	12.4	14.1
Small Cities	7.1	7.8	10.2	n.a.	8.2	8.6	10.8	13.0
Small Towns	8.8	9.4	12.5	n.a.	9.9	8.1	10.7	11.8
Rural Farm	6.5	5.8	5.4	6.2	9.9	8.1	10.7	6.6
Rural Non-Farm	8.3	9.1	9.5	10.2	8.0	7.3	7.9	9.7
Total Population	7.6	8.1	9.7	10.6	10.2	9.3	10.9	12.1

Source: Census of Canada
Note: [1]For definitions see Table 1



Oyster River, and Pritchard.

Therefore, we can only know by inference from the present data where the trends in rural seniors are occurring. But from the fact that there are data for many small incorporated places, for example, Harrison Hot Springs, Keremeos, and Silverton, we can make some reasonable surmises about the prevalence of these trends.

Table 3: Growth in Numbers and Growth Rates of the Elderly Living in Rural Areas and Small Towns in British Columbia, 1961-1986

POPULATION 65 YEARS AND OVER

	Numbers (000s)				Avg. Annual % Change		
Total Rural B.C.	1961	1971	1981	1986	1961 -71	1971 -81	1971 -86
Numbers	50.7	54.4	69.0	79.3	0.7	2.7	3.0
% Province	30.6	26.5	23.1	22.6	n.a	n.a	n.a.
Farm	5.1	4.2	3.0	3.4	-1.8	-2.9	2.6
Countryside*	7.6	8.5	11.1	13.2	1.3	3.0	3.8
Village/ Hamlet*	21.9	24.8	32.2	39.9	1.3	3.0	4.8
Towns:							
1,000-2,500	4.2	4.9	4.7}		1.7	-0.4}	
2,500-5,000	3.8	6.9	8.5}	22.8	8.2	2.3}	0.1
5,000-10,000	8.0	5.1	9.4}		-3.6	8.4}	
TOTAL PROVINCE	165.5	205.0	298.2	349.4	2.4	4.5	3.4

Source: Census of Canada

Note: *These two categories comprise the Rural Non-Farm category as used in Tables 1 and 2. The disaggregation is based on the assumption that villages and hamlets constitute 75 percent of the non-farm category in British Columbia (Hodge and Qadeer, 1983).

The concentrations of seniors in municipalities under 1,000 in population are almost all showing increases. So it is likely that unincorporated villages and hamlets are experiencing the same trends.

Larger small towns, especially those between 2,500 and 5,000, have also been accommodating progressively higher concentrations of the elderly. The variations shown in the data in Table 3 are the result of towns growing (or declining) from one size category to another. A more precise picture of aging in British Columbia can be gained by reviewing the data for municipalities. For example, of the 141 municipalities surveyed in this study, only eight saw their share of older people decline between 1971 and 1986.

Although B.C.'s rural elderly have increased less rapidly than the province's urban elderly, the important point is that their numbers are up substantially since 1961. This reflects conscious choices of the elderly either to remain in, or move to, rural settings. These tendencies appear to be strongly entrenched and can be expected to persist.

The Geography of Aging in British Columbia

The large concentrations of the elderly living in Victoria, White Rock, and West Vancouver are well known. However, it should not be thought that the elderly in British Columbia choose only the southwest corner of the province in which to live. Indeed, in terms of the proportion of seniors in the population, Victoria ranks only ninth among B.C. municipalities, and, although White Rock tops the list, it barely outpoints Oliver. Towns in the Kootenays, the Okanagan, and on the east coast of Vancouver Island dominate the picture.

The following list indicates the ten municipalities with the highest proportions of persons 65 and over in their 1986 population, which is in ( ):

1.	White Rock	35.5% (14,387)
2.	Oliver	35.2% (1,963)
3.	Keremeos	32.2% (839)
4.	Oak Bay	30.9% (17,065)
5.	Creston	30.4% (4,098)
6.	Osoyoos	28.1% (2,956)
7.	Enderby	26.8% (1,714)
8.	Parksville	25.2% (5,828)
9.	Victoria	25.3% (66,303)
10.	Qualicum Beach	25.2% (3,410)

This brief listing from among the 141 municipalities in the province begins to provide an indication of the geography of aging in B.C. It shows that older people are present in large concentrations in all sizes of communities. As well, it shows that the largest concentrations are found across the southern part of the province.

The geographical differences in the province are more clearly revealed if we list the ten municipalities with the smallest proportions of elderly residents and their 1986 populations:

132.	Chetwynd	1.8% (2,744)
133.	Port Hardy	1.7% (5,389)
134.	Port McNeil	1.4% (2,559)
135.	Fort Nelson	1.3% (3,729)
136.	Gold River	1.0% (1,879)
137.	Whistler	1.0% (2,002)
138.	Mackenzie	0.8% (5,542)
139.	Elkford	0.8% (3,187)
140.	Granisle	0.8% (646)
141.	Tumbler Ridge	0.3% (4,387)

Clearly, northern and resource development communities in B.C. are characterized by very low proportions of older people.

When these data are mapped, as in Figure 2, this north-south pattern is very evident. Few communities in the province's resource frontier have proportions of the elderly that even approach the provincial average of 12.1 percent.

This difference between northern and southern communities in B.C. has been evident in census figures for some time. In the accompanying table the communities north of the 51st parallel are compared with those to the south over the period from 1961 to 1986. Over this entire period, northern communities have had proportions of the elderly (65 and over) of only about 40 percent of southern communities. The reasons for this are probably associated with the generally younger workforce one finds in resource industry towns.

However, since 1971, the proportion of retirees in northern communities has been growing at about the same pace as in the south. This trend to more retirees staying in their northern home towns parallels that of southern towns. About 80 percent of northern municipalities, large and small, experienced growing proportions of older people in the fifteen years from 1971-1986. The much smaller numbers of elderly and the more isolated circumstances of northern communities will pose special problems in responding to the needs of these older people. As we examine other facets of aging, we shall want to see if these regional distinctions are maintained.

Seniors and Settlement Size

In most of the provinces of Canada, there is a regular pattern of the sizes of settlement the elderly have chosen for retirement. It is an inverse one with the highest proportions of retirees living in the smallest centres, as we see in Table 2. Indeed in 1981, the proportions of those 65 and over prevailing in most towns and villages of less than 500 persons was double the national average (Hodge,1987).

Table 4: Proportion of the Elderly in Different Size Towns in British Columbia, 1961-1986

Size of Town (Municipality)	Percent of Population 65 and Over			
	1961	1971	1981	1986
500 or less	6.7	8.3	7.0	9.3
500 - 1,000	8.3	9.0	12.5	13.2
1,000 - 2,500	9.4	7.8	9.1	10.9
2,500 - 5,000	7.6	8.8	11.7	13.1
5,000 - 10,000	10.4	8.3	11.0	11.8
ALL TOWNS	8.6	8.3	10.4	11.8

Source: Census of Canada

British Columbia and Newfoundland are the exceptions to this pattern. In these two provinces the picture is much more mixed. The large number of smaller resource centres probably contributes substantially to this difference. Such places, typically, have a younger working-age population. In B.C., the high degree of attractiveness of Victoria and Vancouver to retirees from other parts of the province and other provinces also affects the pattern.

The proportion of older people has been increasing in all sizes of small towns in British Columbia, especially since 1971 (Table 4). Places between 500 and 1,000 in 1986, such as Greenwood, Kaslo, and Pouce Coupe, on average had the highest concentrations of those 65 and over. Close behind were those places with populations of 2,500 to 5,000 (for example Gibsons, Peachland, and Ladysmith).

When the 1986 census figures are examined for north-south differences, two patterns emerge. The first is that among small northern communities, the smaller the place the larger the concentration of seniors. Places under 1,000 in northern B.C. are experiencing average levels of 8-9 percent elderly residents. Places like McBride and Clinton already exceed this level. The second pattern is the much lower concentration of elderly in remote coastal centres (for example, Sayward and Zeballos) in the southern part of the province.

However, when the remote southern coastal communities are excluded from the reckoning, then those towns and villages under 1,000 population in southern B.C. average proportions of elderly of over 19 percent. Thus, they begin to rival many of their Prairie counterparts.

Age Structure of Small Town Seniors

Although it is conventional to discuss the elderly as all those who are 65 and over, it is important to recognize that, as a group, it comprises individuals covering a 20-30 year (or greater) age span. Further, with increasing age one can expect increasing frailty and the need for more support from family and community. In order to assess better the conditions and needs of the elderly in small towns it will help to divide them into three age cohorts: 65-74, 75-84, and 85 and older. They are often called the "old," "old-old," and "very old," respectively.

The ten-year age cohort that immediately precedes the elderly, those 55-64 years old or the "young old," is also important to distinguish. The latter group, by virtue of their numbers, mobility, and so forth, plays a large part in determining the growth of the elderly in a town in the coming decade. Thus, we are interested in knowing whether small towns are favoured by all age groups of the elderly, or by some more than others.

Table 5 reports these tendencies for B.C. small towns for the period 1971-1986. (Unfortunately, data limitations for 1961 and 1986 do not allow a full comparison over all age groups.) The

general picture since 1971 is one in which the proportions of each of the elderly age cohorts has increased in B.C.'s small towns. From one perspective this confirms that many small town seniors are choosing to age in place.

Table 5: Changing Age Structures of the Elderly Population in Different Size Towns in British Columbia, 1971-1986

Size of Town (Municipality)		Percent of Population 55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
500 or less	1971	8.3	5.1	2.0	0.0
	1981	8.0	4.7	2.5	1.6
	1986	8.2	5.8	-- 3.5	--
500-1,000	1971	9.0	4.8	3.1	0.9
	1981	10.2	8.2	3.7	1.1
	1986	9.7	8.0	-- 5.2	--
1,000-2,500	1971	7.8	4.4	2.0	0.6
	1981	7.9	6.3	2.9	0.8
	1986	8.8	6.9	-- 5.2	--
2,500-5,000	1971	8.8	5.1	2.5	0.7
	1981	9.7	7.2	2.6	0.7
	1986	9.0	8.0	-- 5.1	--
5,000-10,000	1971	8.3	5.0	2.5	0.6
	1981	9.9	7.2	2.6	0.7
	1986	9.1	7.4	-- 4.5	--
ALL TOWNS	1971	8.3	4.6	2.4	0.7
	1981	9.0	6.6	2.5	0.8
	1986	9.0	7.3	-- 4.5	--

Source: Census Canada.

The two most important indicators to note in this table are the changes in concentration of the 55-64 age group and of those over 75. With regard to the "young old," the proportions have remained fairly level and even edged upward in some sizes of centre. This suggests that people 55-64 are tending to remain in small communities. Thus, when they age in place, they contribute to continued high concentrations of those 65 and over. This is seen in the expanding proportions of those between 65-74 in all sizes of centre, since 1971.

At the older end of the age spectrum, the changes are even more significant. The concentration of those 75 and older in B.C. small towns increased by 50 percent or more in the fifteen years from 1971 to 1986! Moreover, this is most noticeable in the smallest size of centre. This is due to seniors both living longer and remaining in small towns. Although complete data are not available for 1986, we see from the 1971 and 1981 census that this trend is showing itself in greater concentrations of those 85 and over as well. Thus, more and more, small towns are becoming home to substantial numbers of the "old-old" and the "very old" with all the implications that this has for providing services and facilities to meet their needs.

The same trends are found in towns in both the north and south of the province. While southern towns have much higher proportions in the various elderly age groups, the increases in northern towns have been more dramatic. For example, the proportion of those over 75 years of age in northern towns nearly doubled from 1971 to 1986. The current picture is as follows:

Location of Municipality	Percent 65 & Over			
	1961	1971	1981	1986
North	4.8	3.4	4.6	5.6
South	9.6	9.7	13.9	13.9

One note of caution is due about these statistics in general, and those regarding northern towns in particular. When we disaggregate the small town elderly into different age groups, the actual numbers involved in the separate groups become quite small, especially in the smallest centres. The process of "random rounding" used by the Census of Canada subjects these numbers to even greater vulnerability. Thus, one must not rely unduly on the precision of these statistics.

Nevertheless, the tendencies and trends are clear. Older people are staying in northern and coastal resource centres in growing numbers, right into very old age. Their actual numbers are, at present, small, amounting often to only a few dozen. But this small scale, in itself, poses special problems in providing services to these seniors along with the problems associated with the relative isolation of these centres.

Male/Female Ratios Among Small Town Seniors

Traditionally, the migration of women from rural regions has been much higher than that for men, largely for the reason of fewer job opportunities. Thus, males have tended to outnumber females in small communities, particularly, in the working age population. This imbalance in the sex ratio (males per 100 females) is still evident, today, among the elderly in small towns in B.C. (Table 6).

Indeed, older men constitute a much higher proportion of the elderly population in towns than they do in the rest of the province. The ratio of men per 100 women aged 65 and over is about one third-higher in small towns. Until 1981, older men below the age of 85 actually outnumbered their female

Table 6: Sex Ratios of the Elderly Population in Different Size Towns in British Columbia, 1971-1986

Size of Town (Municipality)		Number of Males/100 Females 55-64	65-74	75-84	85+
500 or less	1971	90.7	90.9	91.7	116.7
	1981	160.2	81.7	n.a.	n.a.
	1986	116.5	100.7	-- 87.5 --	
500-1,000	1971	130.1	90.9	125.0	120.8
	1981	121.4	123.1	84.3	42.9
	1986	112.7	104.3	-- 110.1 --	
1,000-2,500	1971	170.6	182.3	173.6	131.3
	1981	121.9	128.1	117.4	70.7
	1986	115.9	126.7	-- 92.0 --	
2,500-5,000	1971	107.1	107.4	138.8	177.2
	1981	104.5	147.5	105.6	69.2
	1986	101.1	90.8	-- 87.1 --	
5,000-10,000	1971	104.4	113.2	109.8	106.8
	1981	93.9	91.3	105.3	82.0
	1986	100.6	86.6	-- 76.7 --	
ALL TOWNS	1971	133.2	132.6	139.8	134.5
	1981	115.8	120.4	101.9	70.6
	1986	110.3	108.0	-- 92.5 --	

Source: Census Canada

counterparts (that is, ratios over 100). This was still generally true in 1986 for the 65-74 age group in most sizes of small towns.

Small towns have been experiencing declining sex ratios among the elderly since 1971, just as have cities. From age 75 onwards older women begin to outnumber older men in small communities, but not to the same degree as they do in cities. Thus, elderly men are still 30 percent more numerous in small towns. This is especially noticeable in towns below 2,500 in population. There is no easy way to determine the marital status of older people in small communities, but provincial data for 1986 indicate that 80 percent of elderly men are likely to be married. This tendency is probably nearly as strong in smaller centres. There may also be a slightly higher ratio of older men who are living alone in towns and villages.

Towns in northern British Columbia had above-average concentrations of elderly men prior to 1981. This is still true for the 55-64 age group. However, for those 65 and over in 1986, the male/female ratios for northern towns are virtually the same as for towns in the southern part of the province.

Mobility of the Small Town Elderly, 1976-1981

General Tendencies: The strong and increasing presence of the elderly in B.C.'s small towns is confirmed by the data in the preceding sections. This is the general picture, but the trends are not the same for all towns or for all parts of the province. As we have seen, the concentrations of older people differ from one place to another. There are three reasons for this: (1) the choice of older people to age in place; (2) the decision of older people to move to a new location; and/ or (3) the mobility of the rest of the population.

From the 1981 census it is possible to construct a picture of the mobility of the small town elderly. For example, we can learn whether the elderly have always lived in small towns or have recently moved there. If they are recent migrants, we can learn where they lived before. Further, we can learn which towns are most attractive to elderly migrants. Although the most current data are for the period from 1976-1981, the information will fill out our demographic picture of the small town elderly to a very high degree.

The picture of mobility begins with a basic question in the census: "did you live in your present home in 1976?" From this, the population is divided into those who stayed in their dwellings ("non-movers") and those who changed dwellings ("movers"). Among the latter, are those who simply moved within the same municipality ("non-migrants") as well as those who moved into the town from elsewhere ("in-migrants"). In addition, it is possible to determine those who moved away from a town ("out-migrants") and where they went.

Table 7 gives an overview of mobility of the small town elderly in British Columbia between 1976 and 1981. Two tendencies stand out in these data. The first is that over two-thirds of those aged 65 and over did not move their dwellings in this period, and a further 13 percent moved within the same town. Putting this another way: 80 percent of the elderly in B.C. small towns decided to age in place. When we compare this mobility pattern with that of small town populations as a whole, it is clear that the elderly moved a little less than half as often as younger people.

The second notable point is reflected in the high out-migration rate for those aged 65-74 as compared to older seniors. This suggests that older people in small towns evaluate their living arrangements as they reach age 65. Apparently, many decide to move away to another community at this juncture, while those who stay on beyond age 74 have much less tendency to move away later. Those aged 85 and over have a tendency to move between towns at a slightly higher rate than younger seniors, probably as they move to be nearer their children or to enter care facilities.

One other aspect of mobility of seniors revealed in Table 7 is their migration to and from small towns, for it is clear that older people are not sedentary. The equivalent of 30 percent of the

small town elderly moved away from small centres between 1976 and 1981. Almost 19 percent of those now there moved into small towns in the same period, and offset this outflow somewhat. Still, more seniors moved away from small towns

Table 7: Mobility Tendencies of the Small Town Elderly in British Columbia, 1976-1981

Small Town Population Group	Percent of Population			
		--------Movers--------		
	Non-Movers	Within Town	Into Town[1]	Out of Town[2]
All 65 and Over	67.7	12.9	18.5	30.4
55 - 64	59.0	15.5	22.8	27.0
65 - 74	66.7	13.4	19.6	40.3
75 - 84	72.3	13.4	13.9	11.8
85 and Over	81.7	11.7	20.9	14.4
ALL PERSONS[3]	39.4	22.9	35.0	40.4
ALL British Columbia Seniors	67.4	15.4	17.2	---

Source: Census of Canada
Notes: [1]Same as In-migrants
[2]Same as Out-migrants
[3]Over 5 year period

than moved into them. It may be asked why this does not lead to progressive decline of the elderly in small towns? The answer lies partly in the fact that the rate of out migration is only 5 percent per year; even with no new seniors moving in, or younger retirees aging in place, it would take nearly 25 more years to reduce to zero the presence of seniors in small towns.

For most towns in B.C. the answer lies with the reinforcement given by the immediately-preceding ten-year age cohort. Of the 55-64 age group, who directly feed into the seniors' stream, nearly 60 percent did not move from their homes between 1976 and 1981, and a further 15 percent simply moved within the same town. This age group, on average, is equal in number to all those 65 and over. Therefore, just those 55-64 year olds who continue to reside in small towns far outweigh those 65 and over who move away. This age group also has a strong tendency to move into small towns.

Although not reproduced here, the data reveal few differences in mobility between elderly men and women. Only in the 85 and over group, when women substantially outnumber men, do elderly women comprise a larger share of the elderly movers and migrants.

Lastly, how do the mobility patterns of B.C.'s small town elderly compare with those of older people in small towns in other parts of Canada? The following table gives such a comparison for the 1976-1981 period:

British Columbia seniors have the highest rates of mobility among small town seniors in all the provinces. B.C.'s towns and villages show higher rates of both in-migration and out-migration. On the surface, these data suggest two possibilities: one is that older people from other parts of Canada are moving into B.C.'s small towns and another is that B.C. seniors are moving away from northern and other isolated small towns.

However, migration flows are quite complex. For example, seniors may migrate into a town after living in the surrounding countryside or they may decide to retire there from another part of the province or from another province. Similarly, older people may decide to move away from a town because it lacks services or to be nearer their family, and their destinations may include a nearby town or city, or town a considerable distance away. Furthermore, some communities and some parts of the province may experience higher rates of in- and out-migration than others. These facets of mobility are addressed in the next section.

Mobility and Town Size: There are some substantial differences in the mobility patterns of the elderly who live in different size towns in British Columbia. Two general tendencies can be seen in the data in Table 8. The first is that the smaller the town the more likely seniors are not to move from their dwellings. Fewer also move within their own towns in the smallest places. The second, and somewhat contradictory, tendency is that the smaller the town the higher the rate of out-migration of the elderly. This suggests that seniors in the smallest towns face the decision of either to stay in their own dwellings or to move away completely. Perhaps this is because of the lack of alternative housing or support services.

Further probing of these data reveal that most of the elderly out-migration in places under 2,500 in population is accounted for mostly by those aged 65-74. In other words, there appears to be a crucial juncture for seniors at age 65 in smaller towns to decide whether to remain living there or to move away!

Towns that had high rates of seniors moving away in the 1976-1981 period included Alert Bay, Slocan, Lytton, Hazelton, One Hundred Mile House, Ucluelet, Chetwynd, Peachland, and Sechelt. Towns of all sizes in the northern part of the province experienced large outflows of seniors, as did smaller, more isolated Vancouver Island and Interior communities. Some of these same communities, it should be noted, also had large inflows of seniors in this period. Many ended up with positive migration flows, especially those over 2,500 in population. Among such places were Parksville, Armstrong, Comox, Salmon Arm, Duncan, Chase, and New Denver.

Table 8: Mobility of the Elderly in Different Size Towns in British Columbia, 1976-1981

	Percent of Population 65 and Over			
		--------Movers--------		
Size of Town (Municipality)	Non-Movers	Within Town	Into Town*	Out of Town**
500 or less	82.9	8.8	8.9	51.4
500 - 1,000	73.4	10.7	16.8	24.1
1,000 - 2,500	64.3	13.9	21.1	41.7
2,500 - 5,000	69.6	13.2	16.3	18.8
5,000 - 10,000	64.8	14.1	18.8	17.6
ALL TOWNS	67.7	12.9	18.5	30.4

Sources: Census of Canada
Notes: * Same as In-migrants
** Same as Out-migrants

Sources of Seniors' Migration: About one-fifth of all senior citizens residing in small towns in 1981 had moved there over the preceding five years. This is a much higher proportion than in other provinces, as already noted. To place this in perspective, the total inflow of seniors into small towns in the previous five years amounted to about 12,000 persons. Table 9 indicates the origin of this inflow.

Table 9: Origins of Elderly In-Migrants to Small Towns in British Columbia, 1976-1981

	Percent of In-Migrants 65 & Over From				
Size of Town (Municipality	Same Census Div.	Other C/Div. in B.C.	Other Prov.	Outside Canada	Total
500 or less	53.9	46.1	0.0	0.0	100.0 (8.9)*
500-1,000	17.5	73.2	7.0	2.3	100.0 (16.8)
1,000-2,500	15.1	53.5	9.2	22.2	100.0 (21.1)
2,500-5,000	16.6	39.2	34.8	9.4	100.0 (16.3)
5,000-10,000	21.1	40.4	26.3	12.2	100.0 (18.8)
ALL TOWNS	21.4	46.3	17.2	15.1	100.0 (18.5)

Source: Census Canada
Notes: * Percent of those 65 and over who were in-migrants.

Sixty percent or more of older people moving into B.C.'s small towns originate from within the province. About one-third of these come from the same census division, quite likely from the countryside or very small hamlets and villages nearby. The largest flow of elderly migrants are those that move from elsewhere in B.C. Those places that benefit most from intra-provincial flows of seniors include selected places in the Okanagan (for example, Armstrong, Peachland, Summerland, Oliver, Salmon Arm), in the Kootenays (such as, Cranbrook, Creston, Castlegar), and on the east coast of Vancouver Island (for example, Comox, Courtenay, Qualicum Beach, Parksville, Duncan, Sidney).

Only about one-sixth of seniors' migration into the province's small towns originates in other parts of Canada. This is equal to a volume of just over 2,000 persons from 1976-1981. A recent Canada-wide study (Northcott, 1988) identifies the interprovincial flows of seniors to B.C. as originating mostly in the Prairie Provinces and Ontario. And, as the latter study indicates, these flows are selective in their destinations.

Although the number of elderly migrants from other provinces is not especially large, it could have a large impact on individual small communities, even if only a few dozen migrants were attracted there. In-migration of seniors was selective among B.C. small towns; in the 1976-1981 period, ten towns attracted almost one-half of the elderly migrants from other provinces: that is, Comox, Cranbrook, Creston, Duncan, Parksville, Qualicum Beach, Osoyoos, Salmon Arm, Sidney, and Summerland. Significantly, these centres are most of the same ones that are attractive to seniors from within the province.

In addition, a few other places (Squamish, Ladysmith, Osoyoos, and Lake Cowichan) appear to be developing as a destination for older people in other provinces. Several northern communities also had relatively large inflows of seniors from other provinces, for example, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, and Smithers.

There is a small flow of older people migrating from other countries into the province's small centres. Again these flows are highly selective. They are destined mainly to a dozen towns: Comox, Courtenay, Creston, Duncan, Kitimat, Ladysmith, Merritt, Peachland, Qualicum Beach, Quesnel, Sidney, and Trail.

These various flows of small town seniors raise a number of intriguing questions about the kinds of places migrants lived before and their reasons for moving into a B.C. town.

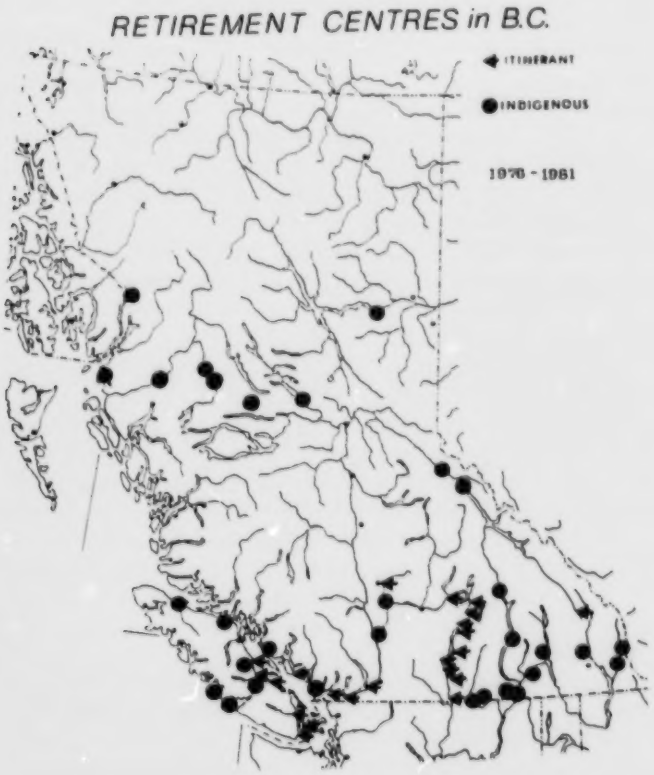
Retention vs. Attraction of Seniors

The other side of seniors' mobility is their stability. There are two ways in which the number of seniors increases in a town. One is from seniors moving in; the other is from older people continuing to live on in the town throughout their retirement

years, or what may be called retention of a town's seniors. The latter tendency, although often overlooked in the concern over a town's attraction to migrating seniors, usually accounts for the preponderance of seniors in a town (or city).

A simple measure of retention is the proportion of seniors who remain in a town throughout a specified period. On average, we saw that 80 percent of seniors who lived a town in 1981 also had lived there in 1976 (Table 6). This was derived by combining those who did not change their residence with those who simply moved within a town. A retention index can thus be developed for all towns. In general, it shows that two-thirds of all small towns have above-average retention indexes during 1976-1981. Moreover, they are broadly distributed in northern, southern, and coastal regions of the province.

A particularly striking feature is the number of towns and villages that retained 90 percent or more of their older people during this period. Just over one-third of all small places (35 in all) have these very high retention rates. All sizes of centre and all regions are represented: for example, Cumberland, Midway, Fernie, Fort St. James, Kaslo, McBride, Tahsis, Nelson, Vanderhoof, Greenwood, Alert Bay, and Revelstoke. If the list is expanded to include some larger towns also with high retention rates, such as Port Alberni, Powell River, Kimberley, and Trail, it seems that many of these places are older mill towns, mine towns, and rail towns.



It also appears that centres which retain high propor-tions of their retirees tend not to have very high rates of attraction for migrating seniors. Conversely, those southern interior and coastal retirement havens referred to earlier (for example, Comox, Creston, Enderby, Armstrong, Chase, and Harrison Hot Springs) tend to have below-average retention rates. This points to the existence of two broad types of retirement community in British Columbia:

1) Indigenous Retirement Communities.
   Mostly smaller, older centres, located throughout the province, in which senior citizens have a high propensity to remain during their retirement years.

2) Itinerant Retirement Communities.
   Medium and larger towns, located in southern interior and coastal regions of the province, to which senior citizens are attracted from other parts of B.C. and/or other provinces for all or part of their retirement years.

Both types of retirement community may have large proportions of elderly in their populations. So attracting senior citizen migrants is not the only way small towns become "retirement havens". Whether there are major differences within these two types of places with regard to the elderly population or their circumstances is explored in another study.

Seniors and Town Growth

What is the outcome for B.C.'s small towns of the trends and tendencies described above? Are they being left to the elderly? Does growth, or even stability, of their population depend upon the presence of senior citizens? Looking at the most recent census period, from 1981-1986, these questions deserve at least a conditional "yes".

The numbers of older people increased in 90 percent of the province's towns and villages from 1981-1986, but only 43 percent of small centres added to their total population. For this period, those places under 10,000 population in British Columbia saw their total populations decline, on average, by 2.7 percent. At the same time, the numbers of people 65 and over in these towns grew by an average of 31.2 percent. This tendency is just as true for those towns that gained population overall as those that declined in total population. For 41 of the 45 growing small towns, the growth rate of the elderly exceeded the town's growth rate; for 44 of the 55 declining towns, the number of elderly expanded while the overall town population was dropping. These data suggest the presence of an aging population in a small town enhances the overall population growth performance of the town. It can assist it either to grow faster or not to decline as quickly.

But how do the increased numbers of seniors we have been experiencing, and will continue to experience for a few decades more, affect the composition of small town populations? The

much reduced mobility of older people compared to other segments of the population means that the concentration of the elderly in most small towns will continue to grow. How high it grows will, of course, vary from place to place. Three important variables determining the proportion of seniors will be (1) the size of town, (2) its geographic location, and (3) the extent of economic activity. In general, smaller towns in the southern part of the province without region-serving industry or services will have higher concentrations of older people among the array of all towns and villages.

It is likely that the majority of towns will develop concentrations of the elderly equal to at least 20 percent of their total population by the turn of the century. A substantial number will have proportions of 35-40 percent seniors in their population, much like that of Oliver, Keremeos, and Creston today. There will even be some small villages and hamlets (less than 500 residents and unincorporated) with concentrations as high as 50 percent, much as one finds today, for example, in Riondel. However, the norm will be for concentrations of 30 percent or less, since towns will still require younger people to serve the needs of seniors and others who live both in the town and in surrounding areas. Moreover, most B.C. towns are centres for natural resource industries with their younger workforce.

REPRISE AND PROSPECT

The demographic trends and tendencies described above are not about the distant future. They reflect choices the elderly have already made to live in British Columbia's small towns. In turn, they have many implications for public policy and governance. A reprise of the main analytical findings follows in order to provide a perspective for such a discussion.

1) Nearly 80,000 of B.C.'s senior citizens, that is almost one in four, live in a rural setting today. This reflects an increase of over 56 percent in the number of rural seniors since 1961. Most of them live in towns, villages, and hamlets, rather than in the countryside. The elderly are increasing in numbers in all sizes of centre.

2) Towns with the highest concentrations of the elderly are found in the southern interior and coastal regions of the province. Towns under 1,000 in these regions average 19 percent elderly in their populations, as compared to 12 percent for the province as a whole.

3) Northern towns have concentrations of the elderly only one-third that of southern towns, but older people are also staying in northern communities in increasing numbers.

4) All of the elderly age cohorts are increasing in small towns. Those 75 and over have increased their share especially rapidly. Older men are 30 percent more numerous among the elderly in small towns than in cities.

5) B.C.'s small town seniors are 50 percent more mobile than those in the rest of Canada, but on average, 80 percent of the elderly remained in the same small community during the 1976-1981 period.

6) Older people in small towns are not sedentary. They move into, out of, and within towns. But a crucial decision about whether to stay in their community, especially in smaller ones, faces them at age 65.

7) Out-migration of the elderly is highest in the 65-74 age group from towns under 1,000 throughout the province, and from towns of all sizes in the northern and remote coastal regions.

8) The young-old (55-64) have a strong tendency to move into and stay in small towns and they more than replace the outflow of those aged 65-74.

9) About 12,000 elderly people moved into different communities between 1976-1981. Over 60 percent of the elderly migrants into B.C.'s small towns originated within the province. About 17 percent arrived from other provinces and the remainder from other countries.

10) The in-migrating elderly are selective in their destinations. About 10-15 towns attract the majority of all in-migrants. The same towns that attract elderly from other parts of B.C. are also the prime destinations of elderly from other provinces and abroad. These towns are located mainly in the southern interior and coastal regions of the province.

11) In two-thirds of the towns, 80 percent or more of the elderly living there in 1981 had lived there five years earlier. They include all town sizes and all regions; older mine towns, mill towns, and rail towns are strongly represented. Such centres attract few seniors from elsewhere.

12) Small communities in B.C. are of two general types with regard to retirement populations: (1) Indigenous Retirement Communities, that retain their own elderly; and (2) Itinerant Retirement Communities, that attract retirees from elsewhere.

13) In 85 percent of all towns, the population growth rate of those 65 and over exceeded the population growth rate of the entire town from 1981-1986, and usually by 2-3 times or more. An aging population, in most towns, can either assist it to grow faster or prevent it from declining as fast.

14) By the turn of the century, the majority of B.C.'s small towns will have elderly population concentrations of at least 20 percent. A substantial number, especially in degree of healthfulness or of indigence are likely to be same among rural elderly as among urban elderly. However, servicing rural needs will face small

concentrations of the elderly in widely separated settlements.

Equality of service with urban areas seems unlikely, but achieving a parity of service for rural seniors is perhaps possible. This will require innovation in the scale and mobility of services that are appropriate to rural regions. Not least, it will require attention to questions of authority and responsibility in the provision of services to the rural elderly.

The first broad consideration that emerges from the findings is that the presence of the elderly is an increasing, not a diminishing, fact of life in B.C.'s small towns. By the turn of the century, we should expect that 100,000 persons 65 and over will reside in the province's rural areas, mostly in small communities. The second consideration, following from the first, is that the numbers of elderly in each community will be relatively small. On average, only 200 senior citizens will reside in each of the 500 towns, villages and hamlets.

The picture, of course, will not be uniform across the province. Towns in the south will have concentrations of the elderly three times higher than most towns in the north or remote coastal areas. At the same time, the elderly are staying in northern towns in increasing numbers. Some towns will continue to gain elderly residents simply because their own retirees choose to age in place. In other towns, seniors who have migrated from elsewhere will be prominent. Further, great variation should be expected in both numbers and concentrations of the elderly among towns, regardless of region or size.

It is not unreasonable to see the results of this study as senior citizens asserting their right to live in rural regions of B.C. But rural areas are also the least well-served in terms of housing, public facilities, services, and transportation. The central issue this raises is how to provide for the needs of older British Columbians who live in rural settings. Factors that affect the demand for public services such as the southern interior and coastal regions, will have concentrations of 35-40 percent. Many small unincorporated communities may have much higher levels.

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